



Health and Human Safety is the Highest Priority

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), state authorities and experts are working in cooperation to monitor the safety of seafood.

- The FDA, in cooperation with other agencies, put in place strong safety criteria and testing standards to ensure seafood from the Gulf is safe to eat.
- Government agencies are working with non-governmental organizations to increase transparency and improve public confidence in the federal government's monitoring program by providing consumers with the most up-to-date and accurate information available concerning seafood safety.
- The FDA is working closely with NOAA to put in place strong safety criteria to protect vulnerable populations, including children, pregnant women and subsistence fishing communities.

For more information on open and closed fishing areas in the Gulf of Mexico, call:

1-800-627-6622 for federal waters

1-888-INFO-FDA with questions or concerns about seafood or to report any seafood you have purchased that you suspect of being contaminated with oil

1-225-765-2384 for Louisiana state waters (shrimp, crab, and finfish)

1-800-256-2775 for Louisiana state waters (oysters)



Current Testing and Results Involving Seafood Safety

“The amount of testing and cooperation between federal and state agencies is unprecedented and a strong sign that Gulf seafood so far has not been marred by the oil,” said Ralph Portier, an environmental sciences professor at Louisiana State University who has tracked the spill’s impact on seafood. “This is probably the safest seafood entering the U.S. market right now.” Jervis, R., USA Today, First catch from the Gulf: Is the seafood safe?, Section 1A; August 24, 2010

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) operates a mandatory safety program for all seafood products under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and the Public Health Service Act. This program includes research, inspection, compliance, enforcement, outreach and the development of regulations and industry guidance for seafood.

- The FDA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) use sophisticated testing that can detect elements of concern to public health in seafood at extremely low concentrations.
- Current scientific data from this sophisticated testing indicate seafood from Gulf waters is safe to eat.
- To date, every seafood sample from reopened waters has passed taste, smell and elements tests.
- Seafood monitoring includes tests for the presence of oil.

• Margaret A. Hamburg, commissioner of the FDA explains "we are confident all the appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that seafood harvested from waters opened today (July 29) is safe and that gulf seafood lovers everywhere can be confident eating and enjoying the fish and shrimp that will be coming out of this area." (FDA Statement, July 29, 2010)

Three departments in the State of Louisiana – the Departments of Environmental Quality, the Department of Health and Hospitals, and the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries participate in seafood safety testing programs.

- Scientists test for elements that may build up in the tissues of seafood after exposure to oil. Among those elements are polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).
- Since April 30, 2010, none of the scientific tests of Oysters, Shrimp, Crab, and finfish have shown PAH levels of concern – meaning that the elements were below levels that could affect human health. Seafood Update, Department of Health and Hospitals, State of Louisiana, August 30, 2010.

**Corexit 9500A dispersant used in the response and recovery effort.*

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Sampling, Monitoring, and Testing for Dispersant in Seafood

- None of the hundreds of surface water samples taken by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) near shore showed detectable levels of dispersant or dispersant-related compounds.
- Only two samples out of thousands of deepwater samples taken from Gulf waters by federal government agencies [EPA and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)] showed detectable levels of dispersant. The two samples from June 2010 were found close to the Deepwater Horizon wellhead and the detectable level found in the two samples was not a level determined to be harmful to people.
- Scientific data to date indicate dispersant* does not accumulate in seafood.
 - Analyses from NOAA indicates the dispersant* does not enter the gills or bodies of fish and does not become concentrated in the edible tissues of seafood.
 - NOAA is conducting additional studies to ensure that dispersant* does not accumulate in the tissues of fish and shellfish.
- Scientific data indicate dispersant* breaks down within four to six weeks time.
- As with any complex scientific issue, there will be a wide range of opinions and differing viewpoints about this issue.
 - For example, marine scientists generally agree the oil breakdown process -- both biological and chemical -- works relatively quickly near the surface, where temperatures are warm. However, there is less agreement among marine scientists about how quickly this breakdown occurs at much colder depths. Little research has been done that directly addresses this issue.

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Questions and Answers about Seafood Safety from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

What affect will the oil dispersant have on seafood in the area?

Available information indicates that the dispersant used to combat the oil spill did not accumulate in seafood and therefore there is no public health concern from them due to seafood consumption.

Is seafood harvested in the Gulf Coast area safe?

Fish and shellfish harvested from areas unaffected by the closures are considered safe to eat. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is closely monitoring the surface and subsurface movement of petroleum and is expanding the closed area as needed. The states are also closing harvest waters under their jurisdiction as needed. There is no reason to believe that any contaminated product has made its way to the market.

Closing harvest waters which could be exposed to the oil is the best way to protect the public from potentially contaminated seafood, because it keeps the product from entering the food supply.

How will the federal government and the states determine that harvest waters closed due to contamination from the oil spill can be re-opened?

FDA, NOAA, and the Gulf Coast states have agreed on a protocol to determine when closed federal harvest waters can be re-opened. The federal government and the states feel confident that when this protocol is followed, the seafood harvested from the re-opened areas will be fit for consumption. Under the protocol harvest waters will not re-open until oil from the spill is no longer present and the seafood samples from the area successfully pass both sensory analysis by trained experts and a chemical analysis to ensure there are no harmful oil residues.

How will FDA ensure the safety of seafood after the fishing and shellfish harvesting areas are allowed to re-open?

Federal and state waters closed due to contamination from the oil spill will only be re-opened for harvesting after it has been determined that seafood harvested from those areas is safe for consumption. The FDA oversees a mandatory safety program for all fish and fishery products under the provisions of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, The Public Health Service Act, and related regulations. If adulterated seafood is found on the market, both the FDA and the states have the authority to seize the product and remove it from the food supply.

Who is responsible for the closing of federal and state harvest waters?

NOAA has the authority to close federal waters to commercial fishing and states have the authority to close waters within their jurisdiction. The FDA works closely with NOAA and the states whenever commercial fishing waters are closed for public health reasons and again when they are re-opened to harvest.

How can I find out about closures?

NOAA and the Coast Guard are monitoring closed areas to ensure that fisherman do not fish within them. To view a current map of the areas closed to fishing (reviewed and updated daily), go to Deepwater Horizon/BP Oil Spill.

This information is also available on the FDA website found at www.FDA.gov

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